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NEW RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL WILL NOT PROTECT AGAINST HATE CRIMES AND VILIFICATION

Racial justice advocacy organisation Democracy in Colour is deeply concerned by the lack of protection for minority faith groups and people of colour in the new proposed Religious Discrimination Bill.

The Bill fails to define what counts as a religion which means that people from smaller minority faiths might not get the same protections as everybody else. This will also negatively affect First Nations people because the Bill does not mention the scope of protection for cultural and spiritual practices.

National Co-Director Neha Madhok says, "We have been fiercely advocating with other civil society organisations for a strong Religious Discrimination Bill that protects all of us against discrimination and bigotry. The Bill must be balanced so that people of colour and faith are protected against harassment on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation.

"This Bill is not strong or balanced. It's more concerned with providing powerful institutions and groups a license to discriminate against religious minorities instead of actually protecting these very minorities from harm.

"There is nothing in this Bill that protects our communities against vilification the biggest issues many of our communities of colour face.

"Muslim girls in hijabs are verbally harassed and called terrorists. Jewish school girls in uniform are yelled at on the streets. Mosques and other places of worship are subjected to horrific hateful vandalism. These are just some of the stories we hear from our communities every day and this Bill will do nothing to protect them.

"We are calling on the Attorney General to add a religious vilification clause added that makes it unlawful for a person to vilify another person or group of people because of their religion.

Let's call this Bill out for what it is. It's pandering to out of touch fringe groups like the Australian Christian Lobby. It's a licence for extremists with hateful views to go after minority groups under the guise of 'religious freedom'," said Ms Madhok.

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